

I can only say, in the strongest possible words that I condemn this bill. I condemn the fundamental dismantling of the Canadian commitment to sharing and equality of opportunity it represents.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in this House today to address the question of Bill C-32, an act respecting the Canada Assistance Plan.

I do so because I feel that it needs to be discussed, debated and reconsidered.

Let us just consider what we are talking about. We are talking about putting a cap on the Canada Assistance Plan. We are talking about telling those provinces in Canada that are richer on a relative basis, that is Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, that the federal government, which up to now used to share a number of social assistance programs with the provinces, will do so only up to 5 per cent.

At first glance, people would say: "Well, what is wrong with that. I mean that seems to make some real sense when we have a large deficit and a large debt". However, let us consider the ramifications of such a decision. Picking on those three provinces already contributing massive sums of money to be redistributed within Canada to those provinces that have less means that they will feel, and justifiably so, picked on again and some more.

The freeze that was put into place has now been extended. There were tensions created then because it was challenged in a court of law. It will continue to be challenged, if not in a court of law, certainly from a moral perspective, a political perspective and a practical perspective.

I abhor any kind of legislation, any kind of government action that will simply increase the tensions in this country at this particular point in time.

It is also extremely sad that these provinces that have more relatively speaking are being asked to contribute even more, even though they are already giving a whole lot as a result of a problem that has been for the most part created by the federal government itself. Much of the problem has been created by the federal government.

[*Translation*]

We know because we have been talking about it for a long time. When we discuss our country's economic

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policies, we know that an effort has been made by the government to slow down the economy. Because of the high dollar and high interest rates, we are in a recession which started a long time ago and which unfortunately persists. How did that happen? More people are unemployed; more people rely on social services in our country. Because of a recession that was caused by the federal government and has a direct impact on people who need that help, we ask the provinces to continue to meet the needs of their population, and then we say: "up to a certain point". So, you see the contradiction. I find this really unfortunate.

I find a second thing regrettable.

[*English*]

When talking about control of expenditures, I mention this and I am going to mention it again and again and again, the government brags about having capped its expenditure level at around 3 or so per cent. It flaunts this. It must simply admit to the Canadian people that it has done this on the backs of the provinces, on the backs of the taxpayers.

If I were to take my debt, walk around this afternoon and simply parcel it out I could walk out with very little debt, perhaps no debt at all. How fair would it be to dump this on the backs of others?

This is precisely what has happened. I do not want to be particularly unkind because we are in that season in which one has to be even more generous than usual. There is not only a contradiction but there is an element of hypocrisy. It is simply untrue that the debt is being controlled effectively because much of that debt is in fact going to be absorbed by the provinces and by the people in those provinces.

We have particularly seen that in the whole area of education. The student debt is going right out of sight. In fact, there are fewer students who are continuing their education. They fear to do so because there are no jobs at the end, once they have completed their courses.

This action on the part of government raises a number of other serious questions. Which other provinces will be capped? If you cap some why could you not cap the others? I know that those which are capped are the contributing provinces. They are the ones not receiving assistance from the other provinces but rather contributing to it. What would prevent the government from saying: "We're going to take the next two in line in terms